

Special Collection

Elite and Popular Responses to a Left in Crisis

Latin America's changing balance of class forces: An introduction

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Abstract

In this introductory article, we present the special collection by outlining the shared theoretical underpinnings of our attempt to understand the current crisis of the left in Latin America. Challenging state-centred perspectives that over-emphasize state autonomy and the role of charismatic leaders, we propose a relational approach, one that focuses on the interactions between governments, popular movements, and elites. While acknowledging the importance of international economic and geopolitical tendencies, our specific concern is to assess the internal balance of forces, which from our perspective is central in mediating broader external forces. The main conclusions that emerge from this collection are that first, left governments were not successful at undermining the influence and power of economic elites in society in an enduring way. Second, interactions between governments and popular movements did not lead to the strengthening of popular sector capacities in a way that could counter-balance the power of economic elites and further radicalize the process of change in the region. Our outlook for the future points to the emergence of a new form of authoritarian state. *Keywords:* balance of forces, pink tide, populism, social movements, economic elites, Latin America.

Resumen: El cambiante equilibrio de fuerzas de clase de Latinoamérica: Una introducción

En este artículo introductorio, presentamos la colección especial delineando los fundamentos teóricos compartidos de nuestro intento de comprender la crisis actual de la izquierda en Latinoamérica. Desafiando las perspectivas centradas en el estado que enfatizan demasiado la autonomía del estado y el papel de los líderes carismáticos, proponemos un enfoque relacional, que se centre en las interacciones entre gobiernos, movimientos populares y élites. Si bien reconocemos la importancia de las tendencias económicas y geopolíticas internacionales,

les, nuestra preocupación específica es evaluar el equilibrio interno de fuerzas, que desde nuestra perspectiva es fundamental en las fuerzas externas más amplias. Las principales conclusiones que surgen de esta colección son: primero, los gobiernos de izquierda no tuvieron éxito en socavar la influencia y el poder de las élites económicas en la sociedad de forma duradera. Segundo, las interacciones entre gobiernos y movimientos populares no condujeron al fortalecimiento de las capacidades del sector popular de una manera que pudiera contrarrestar el poder de las élites económicas y radicalizar aún más el proceso de cambio en la región. Nuestra perspectiva para el futuro apunta al surgimiento de una nueva forma de estado autoritario. *Palabras clave:* equilibrio de fuerzas, marea rosa, populismo, movimientos sociales, élites económicas, América Latina.

Introduction

Latin America's pink tide is in crisis. The initial clues signaling the decline of this historic wave of left-of-centre governments that swept over Latin America during the first decade and a half of the twenty-first century first appeared in 2009 with the right wing coup in Honduras against elected president Manuel Zelaya (Shipley, 2017; Gordon & Webber, 2013). Then, in 2012, Paraguayan president Fernando Lugo was impeached on highly dubious grounds, setting the stage for the return of the right wing to the country (Hetherington, 2012). However, until 2015, these appeared to be isolated cases. In Argentina, this was the year that wealthy businessman Mauricio Macri led his new economic elite-driven party to electoral victory over Peronist party candidate Daniel Scioli, the chosen successor of then president Cristina Kirchner.

According to Joshua Frens-String and Alejandro Velasco (2016), the political swing to the right became “undeniable” in 2016 with the impeachment, or more accurately, the ‘institutional coup’, against president Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, setting the stage for the rise of ultra-right wing politician and current president Jair Bolsonaro. Even in countries where the pink tide was still in power, it showed signs of decline. Indeed, in 2015, the coalition of opposition parties in Venezuela secured an overwhelming majority of seats in the National Assembly, obtaining their first important electoral victory since 1998.¹ In addition, in Ecuador, president Lenin Moreno performed a political U-turn, pursuing a neoliberal path and causing his party to split. The adoption of a neoliberal policy package in October 2019 triggered intense protests for over ten days and forced the president to back down on its reforms. Finally, Evo Morales lost the 2016 referendum to remove term limits to allow him to stand again in the 2019 presidential election. However, he nevertheless asked the constitutional tribunal to bypass the popular will, and was ultimately allowed to run again. Despite his likely lead in the popular vote, suspected irregularities² in the counting process elicited important protests that were used as a springboard for right wing groups to force Morales out of power and eventually into exile in Mexico.

This swift and recent turn of events calls for a fresh look at what happened in the region and an assessment of the strengths and shortcomings of the pink tide and what led to its decline. The purpose of this special collection is to

move away from mainstream perspectives that focus on the state and the performance of the left in power. State-centred perspectives start from the assumption of state autonomy; that is, that the state acts independently of social forces. They center their attention on what governments did or did not do, making them the main, if not the sole bearer of agency in society. Although the actions initiated (or not) by left governments are obviously important, we aim to offer a relational perspective, one where the focus is specifically on the interactions between governments and social forces, both elites and popular movements. One of the central aims of our relational approach is to avoid the paternalistic tendency often evident in mainstream analyses of Latin America, wherein researchers project onto the region a range of problematic assumptions using the supposedly democratic and developed societies of the Global North as a model, what Lander (2000) refers to as the “coloniality of knowledge”. From this paternalistic perspective, research attempts to assess the performance of left governments according to narrow disciplinary or political perspectives, without questioning whether this perspective really corresponds not only to a given government’s program, but also to the context in which a particular government operates in. This tendency is most evident in works of comparative politics where the most important measures of success are economic growth and the control of inflation, listing comparative factors regardless of local contexts (Weyland, Madrid & Hunter, 2010, p. 141), or where a study of the political economy of Latin America begins with a discussion of the United States as the reference point (Kingstone, 2011). To be sure: we do not argue against comparative politics altogether, but against a comparative politics where the local context is not adequately integrated.

Towards a relational perspective on the pink tide

Much of the literature seems to agree that the pink tide was, to various degrees, successful at reducing poverty and inequality. This raises a key question: why have left governments lost credibility and popularity in recent years if they improved the living conditions of large sectors of the population? We argue that the answer lies in the blind spots of mainstream state-centred perspectives. States and governments do not act on empty spaces devoid of actors, nor are they mere skiffs carried by the tide of global capitalism. They interact with a society, whose members are organized to a greater or lesser extent, and develop strategies with respect to their goals and to those of other actors who can push for and against their policies, and who can constrain governments by limiting their capacity to act, or forcing them to go in one direction or another (Jessop, 2007). Hence, the approach privileged in this special collection traces and analyses the evolution of the relationship between economic elites, popular sectors, and the states governed by the left. Although relying on concepts of classical political economy, such as class, crisis, and exploitation, our approach is decidedly anti “economistic.” We understand capitalism as a general dynam-

ic with an uneven course, marked by upsurges and slumps, that impact particular places differently according to the specificities of the local economy and political struggles. The effect of world trends is therefore politicized locally, rather than the automatic result of purely objective economic forces. In particular, our approach seeks to understand the successes and limitations of the pink tide as the result of transformations in the balance of class forces (Poulantzas, 1981). By saying this, we do not reduce all struggles to class struggles, but we do contend that it would be impossible to understand the momentous shifts of the kind the region is currently undergoing without putting the class relation at the center of our analysis.

In emphasizing the primacy of the class relation, our approach is particularly critical of ongoing debates on populism and the thesis of the so-called “two-lefts” (Weyland, 2013; de la Torre & Arnson, 2013; Philip & Panizza, 2011; Hawkins, 2010; Edwards, 2010; Castañeda & Morales, 2008; to name only a few). This literature argues that the populist leaders of the “bad” left (Chávez in Venezuela, Correa in Ecuador, and Morales in Bolivia) emerged and won elections based on personalistic and charismatic linkages with voters. Once in power, populist leaders reorganized state institutions to centralize power and favor their reelection through clientelist measures. Their charismatic linkages include a polarizing discourse that lambasts economic elites and American imperialism. The bad left, the argument goes, ultimately produces unstable reforms because it is organized around a singular leader rather than building proper institutions. By contrast, the non-populist “good” left (the PT in Brazil or the Concertación in Chile), are based on older and more institutionalized parties with longer histories that abide by the existing democratic rules and produce more sustainable changes (Levitsky & Roberts, 2011).

The literature on populism has not always acknowledged its actual roots in Weber’s sociology³ and the typology he created to differentiate the traditional (patrimonial) from the rational-legal (institutional) and the charismatic forms of domination. The current literature tends to connote populism negatively because it conceives of the charismatic linkage between the leader and its followers as contrary to the rationality of democratic institutions. Were the Weberian origin recognized, authors would have to highlight that Weber saw charisma as a recurrent phenomenon that arises in times of distress, when a broken order cannot respond to peoples’ demands (Weber, 1946, p. 245). From this perspective, populist leaders are not the cause of weakening institutions, but their result. This understanding of populism is in line with Laclau’s (2005) theorization, for whom populism is a component of democracy that emerges when a large number of unmet demands create a common sense of frustration against institutions. According to Laclau, populism arises when a signifier creates a chain of equivalence between these unmet demands, integrating groups formerly marginalized by the institutional order.

To a certain extent, such a depiction is helpful to understand the rise of the pink tide. As Philip and Panizza (2011) argue, the neoliberal policies applied in

Latin America during the 1990s caused tensions, social and economic exclusion, and a deficit in representation – unmet demands – that explain the rise of leaders who promised to replace the broken institutional order. However, focusing on the charismatic leader leads one to lose sight of the more complex social interactions at play between the government managing certain state capacities, elites, and the popular sector. When critics of Latin American left governments use the concept of populism to discuss elites, they do so mostly in reference to the often vague anti-elite discourses employed by charismatic leaders, rather than the actual elites and their opposition to forms of institution building initiated by the left for the purposes of meeting popular demands. At the same time, analyses of populism present people as passive followers of charismatic leaders, often overlooking the vibrant social movements that remained at least relatively autonomous from them.

Utilizing a broader theoretical and methodological approach centred not on populist leadership, but on the relationship between the state, its government, and different sectors of society produces what we believe is ultimately a much more complete and sophisticated explanation for the decline of the pink tide. Through this approach, we can see that once the populist-labeled and other left-leaning governments took office, economic elites, now deprived of their former channels of influence, often worked to block the transformations promised by the pink tide. For instance, in Venezuela, economic elites famously attempted a coup in 2002 and supported an oil blockage at the end of the same year (Coronil, 2011). In Bolivia, elites from Santa Cruz and its neighboring provinces instigated mass protests promoting a regional identity against the central government, which led to several racist attacks after Morales's election, including a peasant massacre in the Pando province in 2008 (Eaton, 2007; Webber, 2011, pp. 135-140). In 2008, landowning elites in Argentina opposed the project to increase taxes on agricultural exports, forcing the government of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner to retreat on the reform (Vommaro, 2019). In Ecuador, elites fomented protests against a project to raise inheritance taxes in 2015, successfully blocking the bill (see Chiasson-LeBel, 2019, in this collection). Elites are actors whose relationship to the government must be taken seriously to understand their influence on the state and its policies. Indeed, as the authors in this special collection discuss, elites acquired a great deal of influence on the policies that left governments were able (or not) to implement.

Popular sectors and their interaction with the pink tide are the other half of the equation. In contrast to many analyses that assume a close and direct relationship between social movements mobilizing against neoliberalism and the pink tide (Burbach, Fox & Fuentes, 2013; Gaudichaud, 2012; Silva & Rossi, 2018), we deem it necessary to problematize this commonly-held assumption. In Ecuador, despite electoral alliances at the local level between Pachakutik, the party of the Indigenous and other social movements (Becker, 2010), and Correa's party, the most important Indigenous organization, CONAIE, never entered into a formal alliance with Correa and opposed the government on var-

ious issues (see Lalander, Lembke & Ospina, 2019, in this collection). The PT in Brazil came to dominate the country's political landscape, forming a coalition that brought together the labour movement, landless workers, middle-class intellectuals, women's movements, and progressive sectors of the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, in order to form a government, they also forged alliances with right wing parties, to the irritation and disappointment of sections of its left wing base (see Bohn & Levy, 2019, in this collection). Ultimately, the PT was unable to cope with the democratic demands of new movements that erupted in 2013 (Larrabure, 2016), opening new spaces for the right wing. Similarly, in Chile, the student movement was crucial in helping to delegitimize the centre-left Concertación, while leading the formation of a new left coalition Frente Amplio. In Venezuela and Argentina, the relationship between social movements and the ruling left government has often been more complex, as movements find themselves simultaneously supporting and defying the frameworks of participation created by Kirchnerismo (Araujo, 2017; Lapegna, Pablo & Natalucci, 2019) and Chavismo (Gabbert & Martínez, 2018).

From the perspective adopted for this special collection, it is these state-society interactions between economic elites, governments of the left, and popular sector organizations that are the key to understanding the current state of the pink tide. With this in mind, we invited scholars of Latin American politics and development to contribute to this collection with the goal of producing a dynamic mosaic that moves between the specific balance of power of an individual country and that of the continent as a whole.⁴ Our central guiding questions became: how has the shifting balance of power influenced the capacity of left governments to implement their program, and to what extent were these same governments able to themselves shift the balance of power by either strengthening or weakening different sectors of society? In other words, just as neoliberal reforms tended to weaken labour unions and increase investors' freedom and access to state institutions, thus undermining the capacity of traditional left parties to meet popular demands, was the pink tide successful at empowering popular sectors while undermining the political capacity of economic elites?

Internal mediation of the international economic context

Although the focus of each of the articles is on the balance of power internal to each country, this balance is nevertheless articulated into the context of the global hierarchy resulting from an uneven capitalist system. In this respect, the global economic crisis that started in 2008 is important to our reflections. As Claudio Katz (2012) noted, Latin American economies displayed a level of resilience in the face of what became known as the Great Recession. Indeed, while the crisis wreaked havoc on financial institutions around the world and economists began to speak of a 'new normal' of little to no growth for years or

even decades, Latin American economies bounced back quickly, in some cases achieving amongst the highest levels of growth in the world.

Nevertheless, the global economic crisis was more than the mere explosion of a financial bubble, but in fact an overproduction crisis projected to last for years (McNally, 2011; Panitch & Gindin, 2011), with Latin America feeling the pinch much later than Europe and North America (Webber, 2017). China is central to this story. China's growth dropped from an average of more than 10 percent since 2002, to less than 8 percent in 2012, and under 7 percent since 2015.⁵ China happened to have been the fastest growing destination for South America's exports during the pink tide.⁶ The slowing down of China's growth affected the whole region. In 2014, the price of oil also plummeted, accompanying other commodities. The capacity to dodge the world crisis after 2013 was eroded as reserves had already been dented, and the level of commodity rents to refurbish them was declining.

The crisis did reveal a common failure of all the different hues of left governance; namely, that the promise to diversify the economy away from primary resource extraction never materialized, and that the "good left" has not been much better at it than the "bad one". El Salvador is likely the only exception since social pressure resulted in the adoption of a legal ban on all forms of metallic mining in 2017 (Spalding, 2018). Indeed, as a result of the commodities boom, Latin America has experienced a re-primarization – the growing importance of the extractive sector vis-a-vis other sectors, especially industrial products (Veltmeyer & Petras, 2014; North & Grinspun, 2016). The case of Venezuela is particularly notable in this regard, with Chavismo's vision of twenty-first century socialism becoming decisively tied to the vicissitudes of the global petroleum market (Lander, 2018). The phenomenon of re-primarization has driven the emergence of an abundant literature on extractivism that highlights the limitations of attempting to leverage the natural resources sector for meaningful social and economic development (Auty, 1993; Acosta, 2009; Hujo, 2012; Thorp et al., 2012; Mosley, 2018; Bebbington et al., 2018, to name a few). In addition, this literature has traced the negative impact of extractive operations on the environment and on marginalized communities (Bebbington, 2012; Seoane et al., 2013; Gilberthorpe, & Hilson, 2014; Deonandan & Dougherty, 2016, to name a few). Noteworthy are the articles of ERLACS 2018 Special Collection, which offer a reading of the state-society interactions pertaining to the extractive sector and the influence of community resistance on policymaking, a theme also present in the articles in this collection.

Our approach attempts to go beyond the existing literature on extractivism that has tended to emphasize how external global economic factors determine domestic policies (Svampa, 2013; Arsel et al., 2016; Webber, 2017). When the literature does include internal struggles around the extraction of natural resources, it does so mostly by opposing states allied with transnational extractive corporations to local communities, thereby leaving little analytical space

for the role of domestic economic elites in the policy design and their results. In contrast to this, we insisted on putting the emphasis on the *internal mediation* of international trends. Hence, we can detect a variety of local responses to the 2008 global economic crisis. For instance, while the Morales government in Bolivia and the Correa government in Ecuador attempted to pursue a countercyclical strategy of public investments, Brazil, under Dilma Rousseff, adopted a program of austerity. However, this was insufficient to satisfy the local economic elites that successfully orchestrated a political campaign against Dilma, Lula and the PT, paving the way for Jair Bolsonaro and the return of orthodox neoliberalism to the country. The articles in this collection provide us with the kind of comparative content needed to understand the dialectic between local and global, trend and counter trend.

International geopolitical context

In their introduction to an overview of the left in power in the region that they styled “cycle of challenge to neoliberalism in Latin America”, Hernán Ouviaña and Mabel Thwaites-Rey (2018, p. 33), retake the concept of “international Bonapartism” developed by Silvio Frondizi in the 1950s to explain the autonomy gained by Argentina during the Second World War and immediately after. At the time, international Bonapartism described the combination of the diminishing control exerted by the weakened British Empire while the United States had not yet taken its international role as hegemon. This international scenario opened the space for greater autonomy for the Argentinian state that allowed the development of the first Perón government. This argument overlaps and complements one of the most highly debated hypotheses developed by the dependency school since the 1960s, namely that dependent, ‘satellite’ countries experience their greatest economic development when their ties to the metropolis are weakest (Frank, 1969, pp. 9-10). Ouviaña and Thwaites-Rey (2018) suggest that a situation similar to the 1950s allowed for the twenty-first century turn to the left: the tensions created by an overstretched United States empire attempting to deal with the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, while China had not yet taken a more dominant role, explains the space of freedom in which left governments could grow.

This new phase of international Bonapartism would explain not only how various left-leaning governments could implement their policies in the face of the United States, but also how they could develop a series of international institutions clearly competing with the interAmerican network developed to maintain the region as a docile servant of the United States. The ALBA-TCP, the UNASUR and the CELAC⁷ clearly stated their intent to offer an alternative to the Organization of American States (Chiasson-LeBel, 2015) and attempts to develop a Free Trade Area of the Americas in the early 2000s. As Muhr (2011) argues, these bodies of regional integration form a third generation of regionalism that challenges colonialism and imperialism. These alternative bodies of

regional integration had two main motors: Brazil and Venezuela. Because of its demographic weight and economic importance, Brazil had the capacity to drag other countries of the region along its trajectory. Under PT governments, Brazil attempted to assert its regional importance by reinforcing regional linkages against the influence of the United States. Its development bank, BNDES, supported the transnational expansion of its firms, notably in civil engineering, in the region and beyond (Vainer & Braga Vieira, 2017). It also strengthened its ties with the emerging economies of the BRICS, not against global capitalism, but as a means to assert greater influence within it (García & Bond, 2015). Venezuela, for its part, used its oil rents to generate international support against United States imperialism in the region, in spite of the fact that the United States was, until recently, Venezuela's best customer when it came to oil. According to Girvan (2011, p. 163), oil rent and credits flowing through Petrocaribe, the institution founded to manage Venezuelan oil-based support programs to the Caribbean, became the main provider of funds to the region, overtaking the European Union, USAID, the IADB and the World Bank.

These third generation institutions of regionalism had a significant impact on regional politics on several occasions. For instance, during the police uprising of September 2010 in Ecuador, UNASUR worded a strong declaration against defiance of institutional authority and in support of elected civil power. The same did not happen during the more recent police uprising in Bolivia in October 2019 because most countries had suspended their membership or had withdrawn from UNASUR in 2018. UNASUR also intervened during the victory of Maduro in the 2014 Venezuelan presidential elections held after the death of Chávez, a victory not recognized by the opposition. UNASUR's intervention helped to diffuse tensions in the country and provide legitimacy to Maduro. In sum, UNASUR improved institutional stability by providing international support to governments facing internal tensions.

Nevertheless, these new regional entities' contribution to a "revolutionary democracy" through a "pluriscalar war of position" as stated by Muhr (2012, p. 7) is much less clear. Muhr suggests that third generation regionalism, especially through ALBA-TCP, helped bridge the gap between the local, national, regional and global struggles for hegemony of the popular classes, notably by involving social movements in the process of regional integration. The official organigram of ALBA-TCP had a council of social movements sitting at the same level as the presidential council, claiming to include popular sectors in the highest levels of international integration. This was in stark contrast with the general understanding of regional integration, namely the promotion of free trade through international institutions controlled by economic and political elites. Eventually, a parallel Continental Articulation of Social Movements was created by the movements themselves to assert their autonomy from states and governments, as much as to include movements from countries not part of the ALBA-TCP in their conversations. According to Martínez (2013), it created a double-turn in counterhegemony, a first one in which social movements were

part of the creation of an alternative international order, and a second one in which they asserted their autonomy from governments to express their dissatisfaction with the state-led regional integration.

By the 2010s, the window of international Bonapartism expressed in the region's left began to close. In part reacting to the growing role of China in Latin America, the United States was attempting to regain its dominant role in the region. In 2008, it relaunched its fourth fleet, a section of the Navy dedicated to the region that had been dissolved in the late 1940s. While its legitimacy for military action remains low, United States investment in diplomatic and covert means of influence (CIA, police and military training) for the region are still high (Katz, 2015, pp. 18-20). Under Obama, the United States supported the military coup against Zelaya in Honduras in 2009 and increased pressure against the Maduro Government in Venezuela with new sanctions starting in 2015, which have since become more intense under Trump. In the attempt to replace the Maduro government that began in January 2019, the international coalition articulated by the Lima group was instrumental in providing the leverage that Juan Guaidó needed to unite the typically divided opposition in Venezuela. In addition, the end of the commodities boom meant that alternative forms of regionalism became underfunded. Indeed, according to Benzi (2017), ALBA-TCP's dependence on oil is the primary factor explaining its incapacity to take root. Although the parallel Continental Articulation of movements recently announced a congress in 2020, the ALBA-TCP's official websites are today inactive. Benzi (2017) suggests that the failure of ALBA can also be extended to the other mechanisms of regional integration (UNASUR, CELAC). Meanwhile, in countries where economic elites regained control over the state, like in Argentina (see Monestier, 2019, in this collection) and Ecuador (see Chiasson-LeBel, 2019, in this issue), the IMF made a comeback, offering loans with conditionalities that oriented states in directions previously rejected by social movements. In short, alternative regionalism did not survive the decline of the pink tide. The institutions were not strong enough to survive the defeat of the governments who had created them. The attempts at integrating popular sectors in the building of a third generation of regionalism on the basis of cooperation between governments and social movements did not last, while the former tools supporting the economic elites internationally (OAS, IMF) are still alive. Therefore, alternative regionalism, based on a favorable balance of forces at the national level between governments, elites, and the popular sector, never became more than the sum of its parts.

Key findings of a relational approach

The discussion in the two previous sections on the global economic and geopolitical context argued that the influence exerted by international economic tendencies are shaped by internal mediations and conflicts at the local level. In turn, this mediation depends on the internal balance of forces, but can also be

influenced by international institutions built to support certain sectors or institutions. While an international Bonapartist moment helped to open the space for alternative international institutions that abetted left governments, these did not survive the combination of the shifting balance of internal forces in its member countries, the closing of the international Bonapartist window, and the growing impact of the global economic slump. By assembling articles that present the evolution of the relationship between economic elites and the state, and then the state and the popular sector, we aim to better understand the forces driving the ongoing transformations in the region's political economy.

The case of Chile perhaps best expresses the need to go beyond state-centric approaches, and focusing instead on the balance of class forces as a way to analyse the pink tide. If one were to focus on the state and government in Chile, the temptation would be to proclaim the dominance of the centre-left in the country since the transition to democracy as the victory of progress, and evidence that the western-democratic ideals of liberal-institutionalism are appropriate to the region (Huber & Stephens, 2012). Since the Concertación came to power in 1990, Chile has received no shortage of praise for its supposed achievements in inclusive, democratic development. Challenging this established narrative, Manuel Larrabure (2019) and Fernando Leiva (2019) argue in this collection that Chile's status as the example to follow is little more than a myth, one that reveals the ideological basis of the liberal democratic perspective, and the intimate ties developed between the centre-left and economic elites in the country. Indeed, throughout the period of centre-left rule, Chile has witnessed the progressive erosion of its democratic institutions, which was in no small part, as Leiva demonstrates, the result of the conscious strategy of economic elites to develop new and ever more sophisticated 'technologies of power' that have successfully extracted the consent of grassroots communities for the approval of highly damaging extractivist projects. A traditional focus on the state is therefore insufficient to capture these dynamics, as the driving force behind them is a centre-left epistemic community fueled by the private sector that actively transformed state institutions to respond to its needs.

Nevertheless, these strategies have not totally eliminated resistance by popular sectors, as evidenced in the growth of the student movement since 2006 and the most recent social uprising in October 2019. Since its emergence, the student movement's demands for a free, and more importantly, radically democratic education system, as Larrabure details, has long stood at odds with the Concertación's governance model. The Concertación's reluctance to meet the students' demands have undermined its legitimacy and ultimately opened the door to the right wing, along with its authoritarian practices. Hence, rather than authoritarianism and liberal democracy being at odds with each other, as the case of Chile demonstrates, they form two sides of the same coin, one which the recently formed Frente Amplio coalition, with its roots in the student movement, aims to transform. As the articles on Chile demonstrate, the shift from a state-centred to a relational perspective provides useful tools for under-

standing the role that social struggles play in the articulation of the state apparatus.

The coming to power of the left in Ecuador also illustrates the need for a relational approach. During the 1990s and early 2000s, the indigenous movement led the fight against neoliberal policies and contributed to destabilising the governments promoting it. Nevertheless, as shown in the articles on Ecuador in this issue, the party that won and fueled the pink tide, Alianza PAÍS, was actually intentionally formed to avoid being a social movement coalition. It promised to enact a citizens' revolution: an attempt to create social transformation based on state-citizen relationships rather than corporatist negotiations between organized groups. Seeking greater state autonomy, the institutional reforms adopted early-on dismantled the traditional channels for social influence on the state, both those used by social movements and those privileged by elites alike. However, the strategy backfired. As shown by Chiasson-LeBel (2019), an important segment of economic elites, at first unsettled by the change, adapted and developed new means of influencing social and political space. A fraction of them eventually gained strength and became able to mobilise the broader population to their cause, organising opposition to block reforms that went against their interests, and eventually gained access to the executive when uncertain economic times forced the government to seek new solutions. Once in power, they could count on the support of the International Monetary Fund to support their program, and they pulled the plug on the alternative international institutions developed during the pinnacle of the pink tide.

Focusing on the relationship between popular classes and the state, Rickard Lalander, Magnus Lembke and Pablo Ospina Peralta (2019) show how the strategy adopted by Rafael Correa in Ecuador inhibited the capacity of the indigenous movement to act both within and without the state. Inside the state, Correa closed the institutional space the indigenous movement had previously won. Outside the state, the Correa government successfully bypassed the movement's leadership while repressing protest and dissent. As a result, economic elites were able to revamp their capacities while those of social movements became progressively eroded. Economic elites took advantage of this situation, promoting a return to neoliberalism as the solution to the country's problems in the context of global economic instability. However, they were blocked in this attempt by an important and unexpected wave of popular uprising led by the indigenous movement in October 2019, whose capacities for mobilization proved to be greater than expected.

The cases of Bolivia, Argentina and Brazil also showcase the complex dynamic of the balance of forces. In Bolivia, as discussed by Jonas Wolff (2019) in this collection, at the center of the opposition to the Morales government are elites from Santa Cruz, a province that hosts a dynamic private economic sector reluctant to accept Morales' program as well as important organizations that uphold a regional identity that clashes with that of the MAS. Their regionalist discourse includes identity markers such as *nación camba*, a word that empha-

sizes Spanish origins as counterposed to the expression *nación colla*, which lumps the different indigenous ethnicities inhabiting the highlands into one group. The balance of forces between the government and the opposition from Santa Cruz and its neighbouring lowland provinces was eventually conceptualised by García Linera (2008) as a 'catastrophic' standoff because the confrontation during the constitutional assembly (2006-2009) paralysed both sides from advancing their program, threatening to become an unending conflict. As Wolff shows, the 'resolution' of the conflict was a complex process that included attempts to restore cooperation between the government and economic elites. Interestingly, this process led archenemies to become objective allies, despite discourses on both sides that make them appear as foes. This confrontation explains why the government program was pulled towards a much less radical perspective than the expectations it had created for some of its observers (Webber, 2011). From this perspective, we can understand the MAS's collaboration with elites as a sign of the party's weakness, one which elites eventually took full advantage of in the form of the November 2019 *coup d'état* against Morales.

Felipe Monestier (2019) shows how in Argentina Mauricio Macri successfully embarked on a rearticulation of right wing politics based on the direct participation of economic elites in a political party, rather than using other more covert channels of influence. The outcome was Propuesta Republicana (PRO), which defeated Peronism in the 2015 elections. The construction of the PRO represents a turn in Argentinian history: the consciousness by economic elites that they need to be more directly involved in the democratic process since they could neither rely on military interventions nor on stable backdoor access to power. The recurrent crisis of Argentinian capitalism and the rise of new popular movements meant that their access to the state needed a new apparatus of social mobilization, which achieved significant electoral victories. But yet again, popular movements made it difficult for the PRO to conduct its pro-elite program, setting the stage for the return of Peronism in the 2019 elections.

Simone Bohn and Charmain Levy show how the relationship between the state and the women's movement in Brazil has brought contradictory results. On the one hand, it did produce a fruitful collaboration, a velvet triangle involving state actors from the executive, bureaucrats, and some representatives of the women's movement. On the other hand, their achievements were blocked because other social forces also maintained important leverage on state power since the PT had to create alliances with right wing forces to govern a fragmented political system. A state-centred focus on the executive would hardly grasp the dynamic relationship between state actors and popular movements and the resulting tensions that ultimately led to the fall of the PT. As in Bolivia, we can see how the PT's strategy of alliances with more conservative forces was ultimately an expression of weakness that the right wing successfully capitalized on, beginning in 2016 with the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff.

Conclusions

We can draw two main conclusions from the articles presented in this special collection. The first is that the left parties in government were not very good at altering the political influence of economic elites in an enduring way. This is most obvious in Chile, where elites are embedded in the state, as well as in Brazil, where the PT had to make alliances with parties defending economic elites' interests. The relationship between the state and economic elites is blurrier in Bolivia, where harsh confrontations led to compromise, but it nevertheless shows how efficient elites were at shielding their interests from deeper transformations. In Argentina and Ecuador, elite strategy (the first through a political party, the second through interest groups and CSR policies) led them to gain the political capacity to block reforms, recover political influence and eventually control the executive. Only in Venezuela did this not happen, but at the cost of an economic crisis that neither the oil rent nor the socialist development programs initiated by the government were able to contain.

A common explanation for these results criticizes left-leaning governments for not implementing structural changes (Veltmeyer, 2019). According to Raúl Zibechi and Decio Machado (2017, p. 128), the lack of structural change is the result of governments that were merely new elites trying to negotiate how to share their place with traditional elites instead of confronting them. From such a perspective, the social policies implemented by the left were in fact a smokescreen to hide political betrayal. Such a critique obviously conveys the important observation that despite the discourse of twenty-first century socialism, the fundamental social relationships of a capitalist society have not been altered: private property remains the cornerstone of the economy, and the exchange of commodities on the market continues to be the main organizer of economic production and circulation.

However, there have been important structural changes. In many countries (Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia), constitutional change asserted state property over natural resources and allowed for the capture of greater rent for redistribution. This change mostly affected the relationship between states and international capital, and the latter, in most instances, was forced to accept the new terms it was presented with. This new situation gave a certain margin of maneuver to states that used it to support social and redistributive programs, therefore withdrawing certain services from market circulation, and giving certain actors increased access to the market.

These reforms represent changes to the structure. But the reliance on commodities for social policies nevertheless perpetuated the region's dependency on the international market, both for selling these commodities, as well as importing the technological inputs necessary for their extraction. The result was that states became more exposed to the impacts of booms and busts in the commodities market. Moreover, these structural changes have signaled how states could exert power over transnational capital by capturing a greater share

of rent. In addition, it showed how states can reinforce themselves economically relative to domestic economic elites, albeit not necessarily undermining elites' political and economic resources. Reacting to the pink tide, economic elites also developed political strategies to turn the "hearts and minds" of broad sections of society to their cause. Victory in the electoral arena certainly gave the tools of the state to left parties and allowed them to push for some ideological change. Yet since the pink tide was not able to simultaneously undermine the political capacities of economic elites, eventually even the state discourse of the left had to integrate the defense of some of the elites' interests. This occurred even in Venezuela, where Chávez routinely appealed to the supposed moral and patriotic character of the national bourgeoisie to support his vision of twenty-first century socialism.

The second conclusion we can draw from this special collection is that not only were elites powerful enough to counteract left governments' attempts at undermining their influence, but the interaction between governments and social movements also never led to the sufficient strengthening of social movements' capacities to further radicalize the processes of change. Instead, in many instances, movements parted ways with left governments as it became clear that these governments were more prepared to respond to the interests of domestic capitalism rather than to the demands of the popular classes. This even sometimes resulted in governments attacking social movements in response to criticisms, like in Ecuador when Correa accused some movements of "childish environmentalism", or like in Bolivia where García Linera (2011) responded to left critiques of the MAS by writing a paper titled "NGOism, the infantile disease of rightism". The paternalistic tone in both cases is revealing: instead of praising and strengthening autonomous social movements as the condition for the success of left policies, governments increasingly perceived them as spoiled brats, threatening the stability of the left in power. This does not mean that social movements were destroyed; but instead of finding themselves strengthened by governments of the left, in most cases they were weakened.

We believe that this reading of left governments, that is, their inability to weaken the political capacities of elites and to strengthen autonomous social movements, is at the core of what explains the advance of a right wing agenda today. Now that right wing parties are coming back into office, and much more directly conveying the interests and ideology of economic elites in state institutions, some readings suggest that the right is "incapable of offering an alternative hegemonic project" (Webber, 2017, p. 275). This optimistic assertion is at odds with the approach and findings presented in this special collection. Economic elites *do* have a project, though still mostly inspired by neoliberalism; the question is rather whether or not they will be able to build hegemony around it. As emphasized by this issue, this depends on whether they can use the tools of the state more skillfully than the left to promote their discourses while undermining the capacities of popular forces to offer an alternative. This

can essentially take two forms. The first requires elites to build consent around their neoliberal ideas. Given the recent history of opposition to neoliberalism in the region, this path seems unlikely. The second avenue requires an increase in coercion, something that has become plainly evident recently in the cases of Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, and Bolivia. If, as suggested in this collection, social movements have been ultimately weakened by the pink tide, then the region may be heading toward what Poulantzas referred to as “authoritarian statism” (see Larrabure, 2019, in this collection). The history of coercive apparatuses in South America and the tendency of judicial systems to uphold the executive greatly reinforce this possibility. This turn towards a barely democratic state is of course not inevitable, but at this point in time, avoiding this path appears to require a new cycle of popular mobilization that can articulate a politics beyond the pink tide.

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Notes

- 1 Chávez had also lost a referendum in 2007 proposing several amendments to the Constitution. While the opposition parties claimed victory at the time, it is not the same for them to stop a government reform than to actually win control over the compromise source of legislative power.
- 2 A report by the OAS published on November 8 asserted irregularities in the final electoral results provided by the Bolivian Electoral Authority <http://www.oas.org/documents/eng/press/Electoral-Integrity-Analysis-Bolivia2019.pdf>.

- A report by the Center for Economic and Policy Research published the same day raised doubts about the OAS statistical projection methods, finding no evidence that Morales victory was unlikely <http://cepr.net/publications/reports/bolivia-elections-2019-1>.
- 3 Hawkins (2010) stand as an exception on this point.
 - 4 This process began with the organization of two panels at the 2018 Latin American Studies Association Congress, held in Barcelona.
 - 5 Data from the world bank:
<https://databank.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG/1ff4a498/Popular-Indicators>
 - 6 Between 1991 and 2000, the average annual growth rates of the value of goods exported from Latin America to the United States and China were 16.3 percent and 12.8 percent respectively. During the following decade (2001-2010), the trend was completely reversed: annual growth rate of the value of goods exports was of 6.7 percent for the United States, and 29.9 percent for China. Although prices accounted for a share of this increase, volume accounted for 60 percent of the growth in export value (ECLAC, 2012, p. 51). The annual growth rate of import value from the United States decreased from 13.9 percent between 1991 and 2000 to 4.6 percent between 2001 and 2010. Meanwhile, the average annual growth rate of the value of imports from China increased from 24.5 percent to 27.7 percent for the same periods. In 2011, South American exports to developing economies, of which China occupies an important share, were more important (61.8 percent) than its exports to industrialized economies (38.2 percent) (ECLAC, 2012, p. 89). Import shares represented similar proportions.
 - 7 ALBA-TCP stands for Bolivarian Alliance for the people of our Americas – Commercial Treaty of the people (Alianza Bolivariana para los pueblos de nuestras Américas – Tratado comercial de los pueblos). Initially developed as a Cuban-Venezuelan partnership, it attempted to offer alternative modalities of exchange between states to bypass international markets. It eventually included many other countries under loose terms: Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Santa Lucía, Suriname, Haiti and others. UNASUR Union of South American Nations (Unión de Naciones Suramericanas) grouped south American governments in a common space for dialogue. Similarly, CELAC, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños) groups all countries of the Americas, with the exception of Canada and the US, in a space for dialogue.

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